

# Life and Liberty for Women

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## Life and Liberty for Women's Abortion Rights Message

At Odds With Mainstream Abortion Rights Organizations and Their Weak "choice" Message

Below is a letter sent November 18, 2002 to three leaders of the current abortion rights movement, Kate Michelman, President NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League), Gloria Feldt, President, Planned Parenthood, and Eleanor Smeal, President of the Feminist Majority, requesting a meeting to discuss what **Life and Liberty for Women** has been doing and how we've articulating an abortion rights message and how we show post-Roe women what illegal abortion looks like because they have no idea what it is they don't want to go back to. In the letter I discuss where and how I think the current "choice" and "who decides" messages have failed and moreover hurt the most vulnerable of our society poor women and teens. I quote William Saleten who wrote a stunning piece about this in a book called *Abortion Wars* edited by Rickie Solinger a historian from Boulder Colorado who has written extensively herself about the "choice" language. In the letter I suggest that perhaps its time to consider new and different messages that speak from a rights framework instead of from a "choice" framework.

Sadly, a source close to the powers that be at National NARAL tells me and I quote "The establishment isn't going to take the track you are suggesting. It would be a waste of both your and Kate's time to talk. Even if Kate were so inclined, which I'm sure she isn't, the Board would never allow it. I know you think all the established organizations are wrong but they have their place and I, for one, think that there's room and work enough for all."

This was my response to her comments: "I value the work NARAL does - the electoral work we couldn't and wouldn't want to duplicate - they have the machinery in place for that. But the machinery and the excellent job they do in electoral work isn't what's wrong. The concept of "choice" and "who decides" are valid concepts but if we don't start articulating them in a "rights" framework you and I know our losses will only mount and even now I fear it's too late and that we will be starting all over again. Is that something you no longer fear? I remember your impassioned and worried speech several years ago speaking to that point. You didn't comment on what the letter to Kate said. Do you agree or disagree with our assessment and message in part or in whole? If there's room for all of us but NARAL won't even dialogue with us, what do you see our role in the movement? How do we fit in?"

I guess I'm puzzled that there's no willingness for NARAL to even listen to what we have to say. If the sentiment of the base no longer matters - only that of the swing voters why should they listen to anything NARAL says or come out and vote? We are concerned that we are sacrificing poor women and teens to maintain the shell of Roe - all made necessary by a message strategy turned against us. Is NARAL concerned that the restrictions now sanctioned by their message strategy strips poor women and teens of ability to access services? It was the message to swing voters that has laid the ground work for what will be an unstoppable Congressional move to pass a national version of restrictions harmful not to you or me but to poor women and teens.

I had hoped not to take on the movement in a very public way but rather work within and avoid public airing but if I can't get an audience with them, if considering new ideas - even radical ones - is out of the question, I guess LLW has to do what it thinks is best.

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I will admit that my first impression of reading what you wrote - reminded me that I had tried to work within a few years ago and was rebuffed then as well and I was reminded of just why I began LLW. Thanks for that. The board and I may have let our desire to work in coalition cloud the truth that the message we have will simply not allow that. I will also admit that I guess I was pretty stupid and very naive to think... well what I thought. Yet, LLW can say our conscience is clear here. Before publicly airing our disagreements with the movement, we tried to work within.

You're right - there is enough work for all of us - but I'm being told there is no room for our voice - no room or desire to even be heard by the mainstream abortion rights organizations who can't seem to admit they might be on the wrong track. So we will have to make our own room as it was always destined to be. But because we are so small and not yet funded to even a minuscule of the tune they are, because they have the legislators ears and we do not, our fear is that our impact will not be felt in defense of Roe but in a bitter battle to re-establish Roe."

Peggy

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**The Letter to Kate Michelman, Gloria Feldt, and Eleanor Smeal**

**URGENT**

November 18, 2002

Ms. Kate Michelman  
President NARAL  
1156 15th Street, N.W. #700  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Ms. Michelman,

Let me introduce myself. I am Peggy Loonan, founder and executive director of **Life and Liberty for Women** (LLW). We are a new 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, founded in 1999 and dedicated to aggressive radical abortion rights education.

I was a member of the board of directors for Colorado NARAL from 1994-1998 and have worked as a volunteer with Planned Parenthood. We at **Life and Liberty for Women** are committed to all women having access to safe and legal abortion services and family planning services. In fact, in our material in this packet you will find our fiery in-your-face condemnation of Governor Bill Owens for his political decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains of state family planning funds. Our reasoning of the facts broke through the complexities Owens employed to mask his decision as a political decision and is found in our last newsletter and various letters to the editor.

I am writing today to request a meeting with you, as soon as is possible, to discuss the status of the abortion rights movement in this country, the urgent need for a new strategy and message, a strategy and message like that which **Life and Liberty for Women** has been articulating since our inception. The recent and stunning loss in this month's elections is a wake up call we cannot afford to ignore.

I am also sending this letter to Gloria Feldt at Planned Parenthood and Eleanor Smeal of the Feminist Majority. I would love to meet with the three of you at the same time, and anyone else you may feel would be appropriate. I could fly to New York or D.C. if such a meeting could be arranged. If not I would like to inquire when you would next be through the Denver area.

Let me say that I admire and respect you, Gloria Feldt, Eleanor Smeal, and all others who work hard to protect the reproductive rights of women in this country. While our efforts to defend Roe vs. Wade are very different I believe we can come together and engage in an honest frank discussion and assessment of our very different efforts, strategies, tactics, and messages. It is in that spirit that I speak frankly in this letter, making **Life and Liberty for Women's** case that new strategies and messages are necessary, in particular the strategy and message LLW has developed. While we have innovations in strategy and message that we believe must be utilized to fight the steam-rolling anti-abortion movement and innovations that we firmly believe will allow us to take back the higher moral ground on this issue, we don't have all the answers and so we turn to the leadership and the expertise of the current abortion rights movement. The possibilities of such collaboration are exciting and provide hope at a time when all looks lost.

I founded LLW because I am convinced that the losses the abortion rights movement has sustained results from our reluctance to be forthright about what legal abortion is, our failure to aggressively challenge anti-abortion messages and tactics that have caused women, and the public in general, to be ashamed and feel guilt about legal abortion. I am convinced the losses stem from a lack of a bold rights message and a failure to present the lessons of the past to post-Roe generations in a manner rivaling the anti-abortion presentation of alleged aborted fetuses.

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We at **Life and Liberty for Women** are convinced that a bold aggressive approach acted on as quickly as possible, could very well rebuff President Bush's attempts in the 108th Congressional session to appoint anti-abortion judicial and Supreme Court nominees, possibly delay enactment of restrictions harmful to teens and poor women at the national level, and make moderate legislators in Congress and the President, (whose wife said to Katie Couric two days before inauguration on the Today Show, that Roe vs. Wade should not be overturned) uncomfortable, to say the least, at considering a law banning all abortions, called for by Bob Dornan and Pat Buchanan just two days after this election. But we must move now and quickly before Congress reconvenes in January.

**Life and Liberty for Women** firmly believes that a failure to bring the horrific sights and sounds of illegal abortion into the public's view, taking every opportunity to contrast the sights of illegal abortion with the pictures of alleged aborted fetuses on every street corner in America, opting instead for language and images of a back-alley that few in the post-Roe era can identify with, has done very little to inform those born after Roe of exactly what it is they don't want to go back to. William Saletan, in *Abortion Wars, 1998*, edited by Rickie Solinger, a Boulder Colorado historian, said the strategy the abortion rights movement devised in the late 1980s, primarily orchestrated by NARAL, chose not to confront anti-abortion activists in the street. **Life and Liberty for Women** believes that was a grave mistake. Without such a contrast women, abortion rights supporters, and the public in general, now feels shame and guilt about the legal sanctioning of "killing babies." Baby killing rhetoric and pictures of alleged aborted fetuses unchallenged by the sights of illegal abortion have also marginalized abortion providers. **Life and Liberty for Women** provides that contrast. (In the enclosed packets I have included a look at the graphic sights of illegal abortion that we use in our educational material and our reader's theater drama, "Abortion's Silenced Legacy" about illegal abortion.)

**Life and Liberty for Women** presents for post-Roe generations, an honest and graphic image of exactly what it is they've been told awaits them if abortion is ever again criminalized. It is, for anti-abortion extremists, the challenge that they dread and believed they had successfully avoided as long as the current abortion rights movement stayed the course with their current language and strategies. When anti-abortion extremists face LLW in the public arena and in letters to the editor, they realize that we present a formidable challenge in the images and information we disseminate and equally troubling to them is the new in-your-face tactic, the frankness and the persistence. We're not saying they are waving the white flag, far from it, but it's clear to us that they haven't faced this type of challenge in a very long time and it's clear to them too that they haven't. In fact, Planned Parenthood in Fort Collins and the northern NARAL core group rarely respond to letters to the editor because, in part I believe, their messages in defense of the abortion rights position is far too worn out and weak to compete with our passion, forthrightness, and persistent message of rights. It is most apparent to everyone that we're not held hostage to a worn out message box.

**Life and Liberty for Women** exhibits the passion so much apart of the movement pre-Roe. Our supporters have told us they are so glad we've had the courage to say what we've said the way we've said it and even anti-abortion extremists we talk to comment on the passion we have. **Life and Liberty for Women's** message and language is exactly the affirmation avid abortion rights supporters have longed for, in the language they've longed for.

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**Life and Liberty for Women** is very firm that women, not just fetuses, have a right to life and liberty and that it's women who must make the decision about when life begins and whether to have an abortion or not, based on their own set of religious and moral values. We're firm that Roe vs. Wade correctly and morally balanced the right to life and liberty of both woman and fetus. We are firm that killing pre-viable human life that is what legal abortion under the guidelines of Roe does isn't wrong, immoral, a criminal act or murder, and we are quick to add that we can prove the Christian God doesn't disagree. (that combined with the sights of illegal abortion sets the stage to re-take the higher moral ground) We are firm that women are good moral beings making good moral decisions and that it's never wrong or immoral for a woman to decide that she can't give birth and give her child away for adoption or that she isn't prepared for any number of reasons to parent. We're firm that a woman makes a good moral decision when she considers and determines that she can't provide the quality of life her child deserves. We're quick to recognize that women consider themselves too when considering terminating a pregnancy and there's absolutely nothing wrong, selfish, or immoral for her to do so because such a consideration also will affect the quality of life her child would or would not have if brought into the world. And finally, we are quick to recognize that while adoption is a viable option, it, as the other two options, come with life long consequences to all involved. We believe these affirmations, a new passion and willingness to engage anti-abortion extremists on the street again with the graphic truth of illegal abortion, provides the groundwork for a new rights message.

Rickie Solinger has been most out spoken about the shortcomings of the language of "choice," saying it has marginalized abortion providers making them literal targets of violence and has allowed anti-abortion extremists to say bad women making bad "choices" need to be reined in from abortion to welfare reform. She says the "choice" language has also set our society against the poor woman, whom they think should not be allowed to choose to be a mother because she lacks the financial resources to

be a mother and instead she should opt to carry, give birth and then give her child to middle and upper class infertile couples.

**Life and Liberty for Women** also believes the "choice" language has allowed the anti-abortion movement great success at making women, and the public in general, feel guilty and ashamed for ever daring to think that "killing a baby" is an acceptable "choice" and has forced us into defending the reasons to "choose" abortion over parenting or adoption as not being frivolous reasons for "killing a baby." Recent letters to the editor in my area is indicative of this disabling and disarming unintended consequence to the "choice" language employed by the movement. The movement lost control of the "choice" and "who decides" language and message and now must find another way to convey to women and the public the concept of "choice" and "who decides."

In the book *Abortion Wars*, William Saletan further makes the case that both the language of "choice," in lieu of a "rights" message, and the "who decides" message while successful and responsible for bringing swing voters into the abortion rights fold, has enabled, though unwittingly, the public's acceptance, the passage by lawmakers and voters, of parental involvement laws and the forbiddance of the use of public funds to pay for an abortion for a poor woman.

Saletan notes that when the abortion rights movement decided to adopt that more conservative message strategy, one that criticized access restrictions, like parental involvement laws, 24-hour waiting periods, and informed consent laws, around the notion of big government intrusion in an attempt to expand their base, rather than focusing on women's rights, they also unwittingly narrowed their agenda. Saletan says that conservative message strategy failed to stop those restrictions precisely because the message didn't contradict them. He notes that swing voters agree with the abortion rights movement on the question of abortion's legality only, so "a pro-choice message that called for less government and more family sovereignty was music to their ears. And {abortion rights

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organizations} did not foresee that by demanding less government and more sovereignty for families, they were thematically sanctioning those restrictions...{and that “pro-choice” candidates would} incarnate that message in a mutant pro-choice movement that established parental consent laws and prohibitions on tax-funded abortions as corollaries of freedom of choice.” Witness Senator Mary Landrieu’s statement on Meet the Press Sunday November 17, as she debated Suzanne Terrell, her opponent in the Louisiana Senate run-off race. Landrieu said she’d vote to ban all late term abortions, I assume she meant with a health and life exception. In essence she’d alter Roe vs. Wade to allow only first trimester abortions that would still face parental consent, 24-hour waiting period, and informed consent restrictions, and, we’re convinced, the sleeper, spousal consent.

Saletan also believes that in hindsight those who crafted the conservative message and was blindsided by the unintended consequences would like to “set those {swing} voters straight and explain that being pro-family doesn’t mean favoring parental involvement laws and that being anti-government doesn’t mean opposing public funding of abortion.” In short, Saletan says abortion rights activists gave support and credence to arguments that could be and were used against them, arguments that “focused less on economic equality and woman’s rights than on protecting tradition, family, and property from big government.”

A prime example occurred in 2000 here in Colorado where we faced a woman’s right to know ballot initiative. We won that battle because as you know we have a strong coalition here that includes Planned Parenthood and because we did what ever it took to bring the swing voters on board. That’s what was so troubling to our base supporters during the campaign. Because the movement hadn’t done whatever it took to successfully educate those swing voters as to why such a restriction was harmful to poor women and teens, the campaign was forced to conduct polling and focus groups to find a message to convince those swing voters to vote against it, against a restriction,

as Saletan pointed out, that has all but been outright sanctioned by the movement by their embracing of the “choice” language and “who decides” strategy. The campaign message Protect Families Protect Choice fashioned had nothing to do with the initiatives effect on poor women and teens, in fact it was determined that such a message would alienate swing voters so that message wasn’t uttered. Base supporters were furious that along with the message that was going to convince those swing voters to vote against the initiative, a message by the way worthy of support in its own right as a valid reason to vote against the initiative, the truth that this initiative would be devastating to the most vulnerable groups of women in our society had to be silenced. That can’t be the way we either want it to be or the way it should be, not if indeed all women should be included in the right to safe and legal abortion.

While we believe the concept of “who decides” is a valid one, it must be articulated in a rights framework and it must be combined with an all out effort to educate swing voters and legislators on the consequences of the restrictions to poor women and teens and pointing out how being pro-family doesn’t translate into parental consent laws and being anti-government doesn’t translate into a ban on public funding. Just days after this last election, Cal Thomas said Congress should pass a national parental consent and informed consent law. And with a whole host of states having a law against public funding and the Hyde amendment secure and as snug as a bug in a rug, anti-abortion extremists are salivating for the opportunity to use their new found power and “mandate” to exploit to the fullest the “choice” and “who decides” strategy and language on the grand scale we had hoped to never face but now do.

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“Our” legislators, disheartened, dazed, and bruised from the 2002 elections, and moderates feeling the Bush juggernaut are likely to capitulate after a few token and meaningless worn out message box speeches by the most liberal of the Congress because both liberals and moderates will now have little stomach for a political fight on such a divisive issue and over restrictions the pro-choice movement themselves sanctioned with their message strategy. The “pro-choice” “who decides” messages made little difference in many of their races, and oddly enough, those restrictions will likely give them political cover with swing voters in the 2004 elections. The losers will be poor women and teens and the movement’s ability to recover those restrictions for a very long time, if ever. The movement will also be a loser because recovering the trust and confidence of legislators and core supporters will be critical but daunting and require an untold amount of time and money.

Life and Liberty for Women also believes that a lack of a rights message and the loss of the higher moral ground, has led to a deep sense of guilt and shame around legal abortion and coupled with a failure to educate both our base and swing voters, has unnecessarily muddied the waters around the so-called partial birth abortion procedure and third trimester abortions, eroded support for second trimester abortions, and helped elevate public opinion that women who have abortions are selfish “baby killers.”

Life and Liberty for Women agrees with Saletan that if the abortion rights movement intends to “demand not just privacy but public access and equality it can no longer rely on the old message.” Anti-abortion extremists now have the opportunity and means to nationalize state passed restrictions as they await the inevitable passage of a law by the 108th Congress banning all abortions. Overturning Roe then becomes nothing more than a housekeeping necessity.

Ms. Michelman, we at Life and Liberty for Women believe we have a fresh outlook on where the abortion rights movement should be going and how we get there. We believe the goal is to protect all women’s right to access a full range of reproductive health care including safe and legal abortion and contraceptive services as well as their right to new technology in the area of fertility treatment, abortion services and contraceptive services. We believe the goal is to take back the higher moral ground anti-abortion extremists stole from us and we understand that we must make the case to the public that legal abortion and unintended pregnancy reduction is certainly preferable to the devastation to families and women that illegal abortion causes without saving “babies.”

I look forward to your timely response to my request for a meeting with you and other leaders in the abortion rights movement or a meeting with you upon your very next visit to the Denver area. Thank you for looking over our material and considering our urgent request for a meeting.

Sincerely,  
Peggy Loonan,  
Founder and Executive Director,  
Life and Liberty for Women

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The mainstream organizations of the abortion rights movement may want to exclude **Life and Liberty for Women** from strategic discussions or may indeed think that our message and strategy is too extreme and therefore may refuse to meet with us but **Life and Liberty for Women** will continue to pursue a more aggressive and radical educational approach and we will continue to speak from a rights framework. Just as this example below shows. A letter to the editor we just submitted to the Fort Collins Coloradoan in response to a prime example of the trap the "choice" language has placed us in and the demonstrates the failure of a "choice" message verses a rights message.

## Tell it like it is

"The expressions "a woman's right to choose" and "pro-choice" used by liberal politicians and a host of others is just plain getting worn out. Why place a mystery on such expressions? Does it mean a woman has the right to choose to go to the store or do favorite activities? Why does abortion have to be sugarcoated and made to sound warm and fuzzy and use this worn out thing called politically correct? The dictionary says abortion is the termination of a pregnancy resulting in the death of the fetus. So, if women have the right to choose, why not use the real/factual term 'A woman's right to cause death or keep the fetus/child.' Is there guilt associated with causing death? A cover up? Abortion 'on demand' numbers are staggering. Saving the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest may be acceptable. The excuse of contraceptive failure is feeble nowadays. Both male and female think before engaging in sex."

D.J. Flock  
November 6, 2002

I have yet to see anyone from the "pro-choice" side respond to this letter or one in October expressing the same general sentiment. No one representing Planned Parenthood or even NARAL has responded. The truth is they can't answer those charges and so they say nothing at all and women feel more and more shame and guilt about legal abortion. That's a terrible consequence of the weak "choice" message that can be and clearly has been used against us with great success.

Here is **Life and Liberty for Women's** response:

On November 6 D.J. Flock exhorted "pro-choice" supporters to tell it like it is. **Life and Liberty for Women**, a non-profit abortion rights educational organization, parts company with mainstream abortion rights organizations in our willingness to tell it like it is.

Yes, the language of "choice" has sugarcoated abortion. Abortion under the guidelines of Roe vs. Wade kills pre-viable unborn human life. Pre-viable unborn human life has no right to life over a born woman, and telling it like it is, God doesn't disagree. ([www.LifeAndLibertyForWomen.org](http://www.LifeAndLibertyForWomen.org) [click on Issues](#)) There's no need for women to feel shame or guilt about legal abortion because Roe correctly and morally balanced the right to life of woman and fetus.

Rickie Solinger, a historian in Boulder said "choice" has allowed anti-abortion extremists to claim bad women making bad "choices" must be reined in from criminalizing abortion to punitive welfare reform. Having said that, it's fact that women must decide for themselves when life begins and whether abortion is an option for them based on their own set of religious and moral values. Government should never dictate a person's religious belief about when life begins.

Peggy Loonan,  
Founder and Executive Director,  
**Life and Liberty for Women**

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